

Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation Administration Committee

Final Meeting Summary March 19, 1999

Approved April 16, 1999

Present: Doug Hurley, Chair, Peter Bennett, Vice Chair, Greg Devereux, Bob Dilger, Patricia Notter, Judie Stanton

Absent: Representative Ruth Fisher, Tomio Moriguchi, Connie Niva, Senator Dino Rossi, Ken Smith

Others in Attendance: Chris Marr (for Connie Niva); Pierce Scranton (for Senator Rossi); Charlie Howard, presenter (Washington State Department of Transportation); Dean Lookingbill, presenter (Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council); Ron Sims, presenter (King County Executive); Harold Taniguchi (King County); Ashley Probart (Legislative Transportation Committee); Chris Rose (Washington State Transportation Commission); Tracy Krawczyk (City of Bellevue); Charlie Sayles (City of Seattle); Valerie Southern (transportation consultant)

The Chair called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and reviewed the summary of the February 12th meeting. The Committee approved the summary as drafted.

Commission Activities

The Chair reported on the early March briefings of the Senate and House committees and the Governor's support of the budget request for continuation of the Blue Ribbon Commission. The next full Commission meeting will take place on May 12th and will include a presentation by Jerry Cormick on how the Commission can move toward consensus in determining its recommendations. The Commission retreat is scheduled for September 8th and 9th, at a location near Seattle yet to be determined.

Permit Reform

Committee members' initial responses to the draft permitting paper were positive. There was recognition that the proposed solutions in the draft paper are incremental: to support and extend

current reforms and statutory fixes, many of which were outlined by the February presenters, Jerry Alb of WSDOT and Bill Chapman of Preston Gates & Ellis. The desire remains to offer more fundamental changes to the permitting system if they seem appropriate. At some point, the permitting paper and all other issue papers will be put on the Commission's website (<http://www.brct.wa.gov/>).

1977 Consolidation of Transportation Functions

Charlie Howard of the Washington State Department of Transportation provided an overview of the 1977 consolidation of state transportation functions (presentation handouts attached). Prior to 1977, Washington had a Department of Highways, whose sole function was to build and operate the state highway system and ferry system. The Aeronautics Commission, the toll bridge authority, the Canal Commission, and the Department of Planning and Community Affairs handled other transportation functions at the state level. Under Governor Dan Evans, a project called Washington Futures examined state governance issues and recommended consolidation of the transportation functions under a state Department of Transportation (WSDOT), governed by a Transportation Commission (WTC). The Legislature enacted this consolidation in 1977, contained in RCW 47.01.

Charlie Howard reviewed the effectiveness of the 1977 consolidation against the nine “imperative needs” identified by the 1977 Legislature. The Committee’s draft background paper on “Improving Accountability and Reducing Fragmentation” contains more detail on the ways in which each of the needs has been addressed. In brief, the transportation plan adopted by the WTC does a good job of identifying current status and 20-year objectives for state-owned transportation facilities (highways, ferries, and airports) and state-interest transportation modes (public transportation, freight rail, intercity passenger rail, marine ports, and non-motorized transportation). The difficulty has been the lack of authority over transportation modes and facilities not owned by the state; local city streets and county roads are not included in the transportation plan. This constrains the state’s ability to coordinate investments or operations for the development of seamless connections among transportation modes.

The question was raised about the effort to define highways of state, regional, and local significance. Charlie Howard noted that if the roadways are owned by separate jurisdictions, the challenge is how to make that separate ownership and maintenance “invisible” to the customers.

Another factor influencing the effectiveness of the 1977 consolidation has been limited state funding for non-highway programs. State transportation funding remains dominated by the gas tax, which is constitutionally limited to highway purposes. State funding for city streets, county roads, and public transportation is done largely through direct allocation, with no WTC authority, thereby reducing the influence of the state over other modes.

Finally, the continued creation of special-purpose state transportation agencies outside WSDOT and WTC has created many layers and authorities that make transportation decision-making more

difficult to understand and coordinate. Such agencies include the Transportation Improvement Board, the County Road Administration Board, and the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board.

The Evolution of the Role of MPOs and RTPOs

Dean Lookingbill, from the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, described the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and the Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) in Washington state (presentation handouts attached). MPOs, required by federal law for urbanized areas, are composed of local elected officials and charged with developing a regional transportation plan. All federally funded projects must be consistent with that plan. The eight MPOs in Washington state are the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, Spokane Regional Transportation Council, Thurston Regional Planning Council, Whatcom County Council of Governments, Yakima Valley Council of Governments, Benton-Franklin Regional Council, and the Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments.

Authorized by the State Legislature as part of the Growth Management Act in 1990, RTPOs are the MPOs in urban areas (PSRC is an MPO and an RTPO, for example), but they may also cover rural areas. RTPOs are required to certify that the transportation and land use requirements of the GMA are consistent with the regional transportation plan. Washington has 14 RTPOs. The Committee's draft background paper on "Improving Accountability and Reducing Fragmentation" contains more detail on the responsibility of the RTPOs and MPOs.

Lookingbill explained that the local elected officials and the transportation agencies on the MPOs and RTPOs work together in a regional context to make project selection decisions. Before the federal Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), the MPOs and RTPOs did only planning and policy development. By requiring regions to select projects for federal funding through the MPOs, ISTEA strengthened project selection across jurisdictions and modes. In outlining the project prioritization process the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council follows, Lookingbill explained that the Council quantified the amount of land development into population and employment growth forecasts and used a computerized travel forecasting model to create a picture of how the highway and transit systems would perform given the adopted 20-year land use plans. The Council then analyzed the alternatives and agreed on a 20-year list of regional priorities.

Perspective from the King County Executive

Ron Sims, King County Executive, considers the prime deterrent to a seamless transportation system to be the lack of accountability for funding, constructing, and maintaining the "corridors", or arterials, that supplement the highway system. He cited the example of Petrovitsky Road, an east-west corridor extending from SeaTac Airport through the cities of SeaTac, Tukwila, and Renton

into unincorporated King County. No single entity is responsible for making this a smoothly functioning corridor. County Executive Sims believes this is a system failure. Planning is not the problem, nor is coming up with lists of capital improvement projects that people would like to see implemented. Accountability for the resulting product is missing.

Citing wastewater treatment as an analogy, Sims said if we built sewer pipes the way we build roads, we would have primary effluent discharging into Lake Washington. Metro was created with responsibility to design and maintain the sewage system, replacing the different jurisdictions that had separately been responsible.

Failed infrastructure detracts from our quality of life and may well cause major employers to relocate. Ron Sims expressed his hope that the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation will move aggressively to demand that an entity that controls the funding be put in charge and held accountable to set priorities. He contrasted our structure with the transportation success of Singapore, with its single authority, while acknowledging that many aspects of Singapore do not bear emulation. In response to a question about what governance structure he would recommend, he said the counties, which have responsibility to implement the Growth Management Act, would be appropriate, but acknowledged that cities would disagree with that assessment.

Committee Discussion of Fragmentation Issues

The Committee discussed the ideas presented. A Senate bill, S.B. 6031, asks the WTC to establish a process and make recommendations on criteria for implementing a regional system, including corridors. King County and WSDOT are supporting the bill. Although the comparison may be useful in some respects, Committee members noted that the sewage system is a closed system, compared to transportation. The Puget Sound area's Regional Transit Authority (RTA) has an aggregation of functions; including planning, funding, and operations for providing regional rail and bus transit services; but the RTA does not necessarily concern itself with the rest of the transportation system. And because jurisdictional membership in the RTPOs is voluntary and they are self-governed, it is hard for the RTPOs to take a tough stand if there is any member opposition. This means RTPOs serve the primary purpose of bringing people together.

There was discussion of the outside stimulus that created the new sewage system approach. Is the political awareness and public concern over congestion sufficient stimulus for change? There must be movement away from the "either/or" philosophies espoused by some: either transit or highways. We need to do both. And how do we address the fear of some citizens that an improved transportation system will simply promote growth and create sprawl?

Next Meeting

Staff will research innovative models from outside Washington state that offer different approaches to providing transportation services, such as California; Vancouver, B.C.; Dade County, Florida;

Michigan; and New Zealand. Presentation and discussion of alternative models will be the focus of the April meeting of the Administration Committee, which is scheduled for **Friday, April 16**, from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, in the Small Auditorium at SeaTac Airport, located up the stairs behind the Delta/Eva ticket counter.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 p.m.